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INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS AND LEGISLATION

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LORD READING, the retiring British Ambassador, as he sailed from New York, paused at the dock long enough to tell the newspaper men that the greatest thing that had come out of the Paris Peace Conference was the agreement on the labor question. President Wilson after talking to us most eloquently during the past year or two about the New Day that was to follow this great war, cabled to this country on May 1 that in his opinion one of the greatest achievements of the New Day was the incorporation of labor principles in the Peace Treaty. Mr. Gompers, the President of the American Federation of Labor, who was signally honored by being made chairman of the International Labor Legislation Commission in Paris, said, upon his return to this country that it was the greatest privilege to have had the opportunity to help in formulating this plan which is expected to be of great good to the world. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge came up to New York a few days ago and learned, apparently for the first time, of these labor provisions, which had been published in many of the newspapers about a month earlier. He afterward made the prediction in the United States Senate that when employers and employes in this country discover what he has learned—there is going to be something of a sensation.

But what are the proposals which have called forth such expressions from these men of great responsibility? The provisions cover such things, for example, as a statement that labor should not be treated merely as merchandise. Mr. Gompers, a few years ago, upon the adoption by Congress of the Clayton Act, including the clause "Labor is not a commodity", announced that that was "the Charter of Labor's Freedom". After Mr. Gompers left Paris recently, the wording of this clause in the statement of principles was changed

somewhat. It now reads something like this: "Labor should not be treated merely as merchandise".

The second principle relates very properly to the right to organize both labor unions and employers' associations. There is need for that in other countries as well as in our own. The prohibition of child labor is another matter that does not seem so startling to many of us in this country. A living wage for female workers has already been ordered by Congress for the District of Columbia and is now in effect in a dozen states. The forty-eight-hour week, or the eight-hour day, is in principle pretty universally accepted here, although I should point out that during the legislative campaign in New York State this last winter, where the forty-eight-hour week for women and minimum wage board for investigation of living wage for women and industrial workmen's health insurance, had already been passed in the New York Senate by a large majority, the Speaker of the Assembly, through the Republican caucus, refused to let these measures come to a vote, saying that they were contrary to the principles of Republicanism. To some of us Republicans who had been working pretty conscientiously on this program, Speaker Sweet's announcement came somewhat as a shock. Perhaps his edict is indicative of a lack of appreciation in this country that the war has made some changes in the minds of the people, at least in other countries. Perhaps it should serve notice upon us that we have still got work to do through private organizations in order that the representatives of the people as government officials, may appreciate that there is need for placing this country on a level with certain protective standards which have long been in operation in other countries.

One of the things which Senator Lodge thought was startling was the development of an international labor bureau with powers of investigation. Also that there was to be created an international representative conference in the interest of all employers and employes for the purpose of formulating minimum standards to be put into operation if the various countries accepted its recommendation. But we have had since 1901 an international labor bureau which is largely supported by twenty-two governments. It is merely semi-public

in character. We also have had many international labor conferences for the discussion of labor legislation. We have already in existence some twenty-five international labor treaties as the result of private organized effort of the Association for Labor Legislation since 1900. To one who has been interested in the details, as well as the principles of labor legislation, there is little to cause alarm in the nine labor principles which are incorporated in the Peace Treaty.

It is hoped that through international conferences year by year there will be further extension of these principles which in time will bring the backward countries abreast of those which have long been progressive.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in the work of developing international minimum standards has been that after the delegates from different countries—official delegates and representative employers and representatives of the wage earners and social workers in general,—have come together, and have formulated standards, governmental representatives have shown a very great lack of appreciation of the need for such remedies. It is possible that by having official conferences made up, one-half of governmental representatives, one-quarter representatives of organized employers and one-quarter of organized employes, that there will be more inclination to go ahead. But this may be seriously questioned.

The attitude of the American representatives at Paris apparently was that very little could be done by America. I believe that we can do a great deal in the direction of co-operating with other countries through labor treaties, if we have the desire to do it. But surely, if our representatives are men who consistently throughout a whole lifetime have been opposed to the use of the legislative method in establishing minimum standards for the protection of the wage earners, we cannot expect very rapid progress in the immediate future. It is probable, however, that there is a growing appreciation of the need for international action which will protect both industry and the workers and that we will be able in time to make some definite progress. We find as we go to state legislatures with labor bills that representatives of the manufacturing industries very often come and say, "We are for this; we realize that it is essential for the health and welfare of the

working people, but we want this to be done *nationally*; we want a uniform national law." Then, when we have gone to Congress and have presented bills there and have had hearings before Congressional committees, employers' representatives have come and said, "We realize that this is important. It ought to be done, but it will put our industries in an unfair position in competition with the lower standards of labor of other countries". The Peace Treaty furnishes, therefore, an invitation for American industry to come forward and grasp this great opportunity to establish minimum protective standards for industry and labor throughout the whole industrial, producing world. It is strange that we have heard so little from the big associations of manufacturers on this subject. Here is an opportunity to meet this problem of competition at once and to deal with it in a big, practical, business-like way.

I have concluded that what we do through our Federal government in these matters is likely to depend upon how sincerely we wish to accomplish something along these lines; how much we appreciate that in other countries there are big movements leading to great changes; how much we appreciate the danger of simply interpreting President Wilson's speeches with reference to the New Day, as though they meant a new day in the sense of going backward rather than going forward.